

# **Aftermath: The Role Of Women's Organizations In Postconflict Bosnia And Herzegovina**

**By Martha Walsh**

**Working Paper No. 308  
July 2000**

# Preface

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) has been engaged in a program of evaluation studies to examine the role that international assistance can play in the social and political rehabilitation of war-torn societies. CDIE represented USAID in the multidonor evaluation of “Emergency Assistance to Rwanda” and subsequently authored “Rebuilding Post-War Rwanda.” This report was followed by a book, *Rebuilding Societies After Civil Wars*, which examined the different dimensions of post-war reconstruction, drawing policy lessons for the international community.

CDIE then evaluated the role of international assistance in supporting postconflict elections in six countries and presented its findings in a monograph, “From Bullets to Ballets,” and a volume, *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance*. CDIE’s findings affected not only USAID policies and programs but also those of other international agencies.

In October 1997, CDIE organized an international conference on “Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Postconflict Societies” attended by 350 representatives of national and international organizations and the academic community. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke at this conference. CDIE also undertook three case studies of social reconciliation programs in South Africa, the Middle East, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and brought out several publications on this subject.

CDIE has now initiated a comparative analysis of the effects of intrastate conflicts on gender issues and the ways USAID and other donors can help women in war-torn societies. It has completed a number of field studies in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, and Rwanda. It is also planning field investigations in Guatemala and Sri Lanka.

Martha Walsh wrote a report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. From Ms. Walsh’s comprehensive report come these two papers. “The Impact of Conflict on Gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina” examines the overall impact of the conflict on gender relations, while “The Role of Women’s Organizations in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina” focuses on women’s organizations that have emerged in the aftermath of the conflict. I am sure that USAID, its partners, and other agencies and organizations interested in the subject will find both of these papers useful.

I want to thank the author for the report. I also wish to record my thanks to Meloney Lindberg of the WIDTECH Project, who coordinates the gender study for CDIE, for her superb administrative support.

KRISHNA KUMAR  
Senior Social Scientist



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Women's Organizations .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Emergence of Women's Organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina .....	2
Changes in Organizations' Goals and Activities Over Time .....	5
Impact of Women's Organizations .....	7
<b>3. Foreign Assistance Given to Women's Organizations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Nature and Forms of International Assistance .....	10
Areas of Tension and Cooperation Between Donors and NGOs .....	10
Sustainability of Women's Organizations .....	12
Factors Affecting Performance and Impact .....	12
<b>4. Selected Observations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>References. ....</b>	<b>13</b>



# 1. Introduction

This paper examines women's organizations in postconflict Bosnia-Herzegovina. It describes their emergence, activities, and programs and the changes in their activities over time. It then assesses the impact of these organizations in addressing gender issues associated with the conflict. Finally, it discusses the nature of assistance provided to them by the international community and the areas of tension between them. The paper is based largely on the information obtained during interviews conducted

by the author with the leaders and staff of women's organizations, staff of international organizations, representatives of the donor agencies that support women's organizations, and a cross section of Bosnian women. The author chose five women's organizations, which were among the largest operating in the country, to examine and illustrate the nature of women's organizations and their contribution to postconflict relief and reconstruction.

## 2. Women's Organizations

### Emergence of Women's Organizations In Bosnia–Herzegovina

Before the conflict, NGOs did not exist in Bosnia–Herzegovina. There were some clubs organized around leisure activities (for example, hunting and fishing clubs) and associations of disabled persons, but not much else. The absence of NGOs may be explained by two factors. First, the services that NGOs now provide there were provided by the government. Second, there was no political space or climate for the development of civil society institutions. Although there was a mass women's association linked to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, it was not as active as those found in other former-communist countries, such as Cambodia, or the currently communist Vietnam. Moreover, its close ties with the party deprived it of autonomy (Cockburn 1998, 157). Although feminist organizations emerged in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, none appeared in Bosnia–Herzegovina.

The humanitarian disaster created by the war exceeded the capacity of the government to meet the overwhelming and diverse needs of its people. This vacuum was largely filled by women. Both beneficiaries and service providers were mostly women, since the vast majority of able-bodied men were in the army. The first women's organizations consisted of volunteers who provided emergency food, clothing, and shelter for refugees, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups. These women's organizations also provided the more immediate needs of counseling and medical care for rape victims.

Some of these organizations became partners of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which served as the lead agency coordinating humanitarian relief during the war and in its immediate aftermath. Most groups that cropped up during this time are still in operation. The number of organizations run by and for women has mushroomed in correlation with the general surge in local NGO activity. Some local and international observers suggest that the dramatic increase in women's organizations may reflect their exclusion from representative and executive level politics. If that is the case, then women's organizations represent a parallel political structure. This may be true for some women's organizations, but, as will be discussed, few of these organizations have fully emerged into civil society.

In the postconflict era, the development of women's organizations had a variety of roots. Some, such as Bospo and Bosfam, were spinoffs of international agencies (the Danish Refugee Council and Oxfam, respectively). Others were formed to address specific needs arising in the postconflict era, including income generation (Vidra) and legal rights (the Center for Legal Aid for Women). Others, such as Zena Zenama ("Women to Women") and Udruzene Zene ("United Women"), were founded specifically to challenge and improve the position and status of women in society.

### *Nature and Types of Women's Organizations*

The difficulty in defining "women's organizations" is exemplified in the current NGO community in Bosnia–Herzegovina. According to the 1999 International Coun-

#### Center for Legal Aid to Women

The Center for Legal Aid to Women was established in September 1996, with initial assistance from USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. Now with a team of 21 lawyers, the center provides free legal assistance from an office in Zenica, and it mobilizes and trains female lawyers in smaller towns. The center has handled about 400 cases, principally in the areas of family law, property, and employment. It has been active in advocacy initiatives since its inception, starting with a conference of women lawyers. It has made recommendations on gender issues in employment and property law to the government. Currently, staff are actively engaged in lobbying on gender issues throughout governmental institutions as well as in pushing for legal reform on issues such as maternity leave. Some of the principal staff members are engaged directly in party politics. Further, they are now conducting legal research on laws and using field research to explore their effects on women. This project is being sponsored by Kvinna till Kvinna.

cil for Voluntary Organizations directory, there are 284 indigenous NGOs in Bosnia. Of these, 112 include “women” in the sectoral areas in which they work, although only 56 mention women’s issues in their mission statement. Other lists put the number of women’s organizations at about 90. Yet, women head up almost half of all local NGOs; thus, organizations headed by women do not necessarily target women exclusively. This is one of the problems in labeling an organization a “women’s organization.” For example, women head many of the disabled persons associations, whose collective lobbying efforts have been extremely effective in producing visible results, such as disabled parking spaces and wheelchair paths on sidewalks in Sarajevo.

Some groups simply refuse to be identified as women’s organizations. Bospo in Tuzla shuns the label even though it runs one of the largest microcredit schemes targeted exclusively to women. Others, such as Vidra in Banja Luka, identify themselves as women’s organizations but reject any connections with a feminist agenda.

Moreover, there are other groups that tackle “gender issues.” One example is the overtly feminist organization Zena Zenama. It is working on a campaign to sup-

port conscientious objectors, the vast majority of whom are male.

Both local and international personnel who have had close contact with NGOs run by women and men note the gender difference in management styles and issues addressed. Male-run organizations tend to be more hierarchical with a vertical decision-making structure, whereas women’s organizations tend to be more horizontal and fluid. Moreover, women-run NGOs tend to extend their programs to women and children more than male-dominated groups do. In that sense, women-run organizations may be more inclusive and more effective in reaching out to women, even though their activities are not designed exclusively for women. This is not to say that all women’s groups have such a flexible structure, since some are as hierarchical and bureaucratic as male-dominated NGOs. In fact, many of the major women’s organizations are characterized by having a single charismatic leader without whom the organization would cease to function.

This paper examines organizations run by women for women. The problems associated with trying to define women’s organizations have been documented elsewhere (Walsh 1998). However, it is important not to discount

### Udruzene Zene—United Women of Banja Luka

Udruzene Zene was founded in Banja Luka, the largest city in the Republika Srpska, in 1996, at a time when the international community regarded the republic as a pariah. After attending a women’s conference in Sarajevo, the founders were inspired to establish an organization to articulate their vision of increased visibility of women in politics, of enhanced roles of women in decision-making structures, and of affirmed women’s rights. Although Kvinna till Kvinna provided initial funding, Udruzene Zene received funding soon after from Delphi International/Star and remained in the Delphi network. Income-generating activities are sponsored by the Bosnian Women’s Initiative.

Udruzene Zene’s program illustrates the diversity of projects that women’s organizations undertake within a mandate of women’s rights and democracy. First, it is essentially humanitarian, addressing the material needs of women in both rural and urban areas by providing educational courses in urban areas and delivering livestock to female-headed households in rural areas. The organization stresses the importance of ownership and economic autonomy through these projects and emphasizes what its beneficiaries can do to help themselves. Second, it provides a range of services for women, including free legal aid. It has both a social worker and gynecologist on staff.

The advocacy component takes many forms. With the Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly, Udruzene Zene organizes roundtable discussions for women (“Women Today”) on gender relations, safe sex, ecology, the Kosovo crisis, and other topics. The purpose of these roundtables is “to get women out of the house” and participate in public life. In addition, Udruzene Zene airs regular media spots on television and radio. It also was the coordinating agency in the Republika Srpska for the women’s voter education project, which is sponsored by Kvinna till Kvinna.



## Bospo

Bospo, derived from a project of the Danish Refugee Council, was registered as a local nongovernmental organization in 1996. Its director, Neijra Nalic, sought to address the needs of women, whom she saw as the largest marginalized segment of society. Nalic believes that women's economic independence is critical to bringing about changes within the home and the community. The NGO received a 1.2 million deutsche marks loan from the World Bank through a local initiatives department. As of July 1999, there were 3,640 loans dispersed to clients, 35 percent of whom are displaced or returnees. The percentage of displaced clients had been 50 percent. Most of the businesses started with the loans are in trade, notably in local markets. Services and agriculture are the other two prominent areas for initiating small enterprises.

Neijra and her staff report a noticeable difference in their clients between their first and second loans. When women collect their first loan, they are dressed less nicely and appear less confident. After they have repaid the loan, their pride is evident in both their dress and behavior. The income they earn, between 50 and 100 deutsche marks on a good day, is substantially more than traders who do not have access to credit.

the benefits to women provided by women engaged in other sectors. Such leadership helps mainstream women and gender issues into other sectors and, therefore, deserves recognition and support.

### *Activities of Women's Organizations*

The activities of women's organizations fall into the broad categories of democracy–human rights, education and training, microcredit–income generation, and psychosocial support and health.

Despite common assumptions that women's organizations are more likely to be welfarist/humanitarian, more organizations in Bosnia–Herzegovina were found to have an exclusive emphasis on democracy/human rights (11) than on a humanitarian mandate (8, including those within the psychosocial and microcredit categories). Most, however, are a mixture of these components, reflecting specific donor objectives and demands of emerging civil society.

#### DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

It is generally perceived by local observers that the increase in the number of NGOs addressing democracy and human rights is almost entirely donor driven. This may be less true among women's organizations, particularly those in the Republika Srpska. Of the women's organizations that emphasize democracy and human rights, commitment to these issues began before donors started providing significant funding for such work. Organizations that identify themselves as feminist see

feminism and democracy as inextricably linked. As the cofounder of Zena Zenama put it, "Feminism and democracy are dealing with the idea of equality and they are resisting the power of despotism . . . [T]he ideal of equality incorporates them, so it is very important for me to explore experiences in relationships between these two traditions" (Memnuna Zvidic of Zena Zenama, 1998).

The activities undertaken by women's groups in this area include roundtable discussions, advocacy campaigns, media spots, free legal aid to women, and the production of educational materials on rights issues.

#### INCOME GENERATION–MICROCREDIT

Some women's organizations are providing microcredit to women borrowers, of which displaced women and female-headed households are the primary target groups. Loans, which range between 1,000 and 5,000 deutsche marks (\$US 550–2,750), are provided on a solidarity group basis whereby all group members are responsible for the repayment of all loans in the group. Such an arrangement serves to provide collateral to the lender, and repayment rates are exceptionally high. Although a popular activity, microcredit is complicated in Bosnia because it is technically illegal for nongovernmental institutions to provide credit. Some NGOs have been able to circumvent the rules, but the larger programs work through local initiatives departments in the employment and training foundations of the governments in each entity. In those cases, the local initiatives departments

provide capital to the lending agencies. The bureaucracy and administration involved prevent small organizations from participating as lenders. In an effort to establish sustainable microfinance institutions, the World Bank has now identified seven organizations (mostly local) to serve as microfinance institutions. Among them is Bospo, whose entire clientele are women.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Although education and training programs are not as popular now as they were two years ago, they are still considered important, particularly for women without formal education who want to acquire marketable skills. The skills training offered includes sewing and knitting as well as computer, foreign language, and secretarial skills. There are concerns about whether this type of training gender types women, and whether these skills are marketable to begin with. A secretarial school for women run by the International Catholic Migration Commission, initially targeted at demobilized female soldiers, has a 64 percent job placement rate. That high rate can be accounted for in part because the training is accompanied by an aggressive effort to identify job vacancies. By contrast, a computer course run by a women's organization in Banja Luka has not led to employment for any of its participants.

Other forms of training are nevertheless being offered by women's NGOs, such as NGO development training and training of trainers and facilitators. These skills can prove useful in a growing development culture where meetings and conferences, led by facilitators, occur regularly. Organizations such as Medica, however, charge only larger NGOs for their services and provide their services free to smaller groups. Facilitation skills also can be a means of strengthening cooperation between local women's organizations.

## *Psychosocial Support and Health*

Few women's organizations are addressing general health issues. While some continue to provide psychosocial counseling, the number doing so has declined noticeably since the immediate aftermath of the war. One of the first women's NGOs in Republika Srpska that provided psychosocial services is now in danger of closing altogether. The programs that continue to function in this area are those that have built a reputation in this field and widened their networks to secure funding. Medica Zenica is a prime example of comprehensive health service provider organizations.

## **Changes in Organizations' Goals And Activities Over Time**

During and immediately following the conflict, in 1996, the activities of women's organizations were almost ex-

### **Zena Zenama**

In 1996 three feminist activists (two former refugees and one student) established Zena Zenama with initial support from a European donor and Delphi International/Star. The main objectives of the organization are "to educate women in the different fields of health, culture, mental hygiene (sic), recognition of violence in the family, and the rights of women and children, and increasing literacy of children and their mothers." One of Zena Zenama's first projects was a counseling service for women, providing psychosocial support.

Another project of Zena Zenama —The Organizational Development of NGO (sic)—aimed at strengthening women's organizations in "difficult" and "isolated" areas. The organization provides these groups with training in strategic planning and other technical assistance related to NGO development.

Zena Zenama also created the Center for Women's Studies. Through workshops and roundtables such as The ABCs of Feminism and Identity and Power, the group seeks to increase women's awareness of the culture of patriarchy, with the hope of women becoming more involved in all spheres of life.

It has also formed partnerships with a number of international organizations. For example, Zena Zenama is currently working with the Office of the High Representative on a public information campaign on conscientious objectors. Organization staff served as coordinators in Bosnia-Herzegovina for both the voter education campaign and the Women's Human Rights Report.

## Medica Zenica

In 1992, Monika Hauser, an Italian gynecologist from Cologne, Germany, visited Zenica amid a wave of reports concerning the detention and rape of women during the Bosnian war (Cockburn 174). After her visit, she raised funds in Germany to open, through a partnership with a local team in Zenica, a center for traumatized refugee women there in Zenica in April 1993.

Since mid-1993, Medica Zenica has been run entirely by local women. It offers both outpatient gynecological services and inpatient therapeutic care. Medica opened a second center in Zenica a few months later, followed by a third in Visoko, 40 kilometers away. In 1994, Medica Zenica started a mobile outpatient clinic with a fully equipped examination room. During the war, these centers were the only places where women could get an abortion after a certain stage of their pregnancy.

In 1994, Medica established Infoteka, an information arm of the organization created to document the organization's work. It has given rise to a variety of advocacy-related projects, including a campaign against domestic violence and a recent study funded by the UN Development Fund for Women on violence against women.

Medica also provides residential centers that afford temporary housing to those most in need. Onsite psychologists provide individual and group therapy with the aim of restoring women's self-respect and dignity to enable them to reintegrate into society. In the words of the psychological team, "We want to motivate the women to improve themselves, to learn to determine their own borders again and to assume control of and responsibility for their own healing process." Part of the rehabilitation includes vocational courses in sewing, upholstery, and hairdressing. Medica Zenica also pays school fees for young women who were not able to complete their high school degrees by age 18. Psychologists at Medica are now training others in Bosnia and have made a visit to Tirana.

clusively humanitarian, with a concentration on psychosocial support. Some have suggested that at first these activities were identified and pursued by local women. There is at least one case in which a women's organization intended to begin an income-generating program after conducting a survey of beneficiary needs. But international donors told this group that it would not receive funds unless a psychosocial component was added to its proposal. The negative effect of such a directive is twofold: it denied women's organizations the right to determine their own needs, and it imposed a "victim" identity that did not exist.

By 1997, the situation had changed. Funds for psychosocial programs began to dry up, and the emphasis switched to income generation. Most international and local observers agree that this transition was largely donor driven and corresponded with strategies to revitalize the economy and reduce overall dependence on international aid.

The Bosnian Women's Initiative was cited as the primary catalyst for the switch in emphases of women's organizations. Women's organizations continue to ex-

pand into such fields as providing taxi services, roasting coffee beans, and producing paper bags and toilet paper. When asked how and why the change had taken place, Lejla Hransnica, coordinator of the Bosnian Women's Initiative project for UN High Commission for Refugees, suggested two linked processes.

First, women initially stuck to familiar and comfortable fields (such as knitting), even though they were often not commercially profitable. It took time for women to escape this comfort zone and take on less traditional endeavors. Second, women become increasingly aware of economic markets, particularly with regard to imported goods that could be produced simply and cheaply at home (toilet paper, for example). These factors combined to bring about a transition from sympathy projects to those with commercial viability.

Democracy, return of minorities, and legal information centers are other areas into which women's organizations are moving. As noted earlier, democracy projects within some women's organizations were initiated before heavy donor emphasis in this area, and increased international support has clearly turned these into growth

areas. As most aid projects now are tied to the return of displaced persons home, a number of women's organizations also have taken on this initiative. Again, this appears to be a response to international agendas rather than an organic initiative. Linkages with minority return have become a decisive factor for funding projects under the Bosnian Women's Initiative. Also associated with return is an increase in organizations providing legal aid.

## Impact of Women's Organizations

Before considering the impact of women's organizations, one must remember that these organizations have existed in Bosnia-Herzegovina only for a maximum of six years. The society has experienced massive upheaval, resulting in socioeconomic and political chaos — and opportunity.

One can view the impact of women's organizations at the micro and macro levels. The most significant and tangible impacts are perhaps at the micro level, where differences are made to individual lives. Microcredit projects have saved women beneficiaries and their families from destitution, replacing coping strategies with a livelihood. Activities at the micro level have instilled confidence in many of the beneficiaries, putting them in a better position to pursue other economic and personal endeavors.

In the area of psychosocial rehabilitation, too, the results can be dramatic. Women often arrive at programs such as Medica Zenica displaced, alone, and afraid. Receiving help with vocational studies and other matters, many women are able to return to their communities with new skills and confidence.

Women's organizations also may play a part in raising consciousness among individual women. Among feminist organizations such as Medica Zenica, Udruzene Zene, and Zena Zenama, involvement in a women's organization with a feminist agenda has refined and altered individual notions of feminism and contributed to personal growth. For many women, the experience of working at or with these organizations has helped them become more open to and better able to articulate educated arguments for feminist ideals that they understood intuitively but could not previously express.

Despite these successes, one must recognize that while effective women's organizations have reached out to some vulnerable groups of women, others have not been reached. Few, if any, organizations are addressing the situation of Roma women, who were among the most vulnerable populations before the war. Although much assistance is targeted at female-headed households, it appears to be directed primarily at war widows or those with missing husbands. Anecdotal evidence suggests that divorcees are not among this target population, despite the fact that they may be as vulnerable as, if not more so than, women with dead or missing husbands. Alimony payment laws exist but are seldom enforced. Thus, divorced women may find themselves without housing or the means to feed their children.

At the community level, the impact of women's organizations is especially evident in income-generation projects. First, with an income, female beneficiaries do not drain community resources. Second, a number of the projects started by women's organizations respond to diverse needs within the community. For example, a women's group in Bihac used microcredit to start a mini-

### The Budding Entrepreneur

From a stall in the market in Tuzla, Binela sells tools she purchased with 1,000 deutsche marks in microcredit assistance from Bospo. Her husband has been unable to find work because he has no connections. Before selling tools purchased in Hungary with the credit, Binela sold her own old clothing, tools, and other possessions. She now makes 50 deutsche marks on a good day, which is sufficient to provide the necessities for her family (including two children), and now dreams of opening her own store. She never thought she would have to work as a market seller because she came from a good family with a decent income. But she says she enjoys her day in the market and has many friends there. When asked how her husband feels about her working, she responded with mixed feelings. Binela said her husband expressed resentment because he thinks he could do the job better, but she feels confident that she is competent at the task herself. She made the first repayment of the microcredit loan on time without a problem and has applied for a second loan.

### **Bridging the Gap: Gordona Vidovic, President Of the Peasant Party and the NGO Buducnost**

In the aftermath of the war, Gordona Vidovic and others recognized that those who fought the war and those for whom the war was fought were not adequately represented by the political parties. They then established the opposition (Serb) Peasant Party to represent the interests of “peasants”—mainly agricultural workers.

As an opposition party in the small town of Modrica in Republika Srpska, the party had its work cut out for it. Through informal contacts, Vidovic met with women’s organizations in Banja Luka and in Bosnia–Herzegovina, but the nongovernmental organization phenomenon had not yet arrived in the more remote parts of the Republika Srpska. She decided to found a women’s organization—which would start by providing legal aid, since she is a lawyer—as a way of raising the political consciousness of women. Through her clients she learned about the day-to-day problems of women, and she began to speak out about them. She also monitored the activities of the Parliament. She struggles to maintain the independence of the NGO but also recognizes that there must be links between political parties and NGOs to promote the advancement of women.

Buducnost has received support and assistance from Delphi International/Star, and the Peasant Party participates in training sponsored by National Democratic Institute. The assistance has come free. The aid has been critical, particularly in NGO development and media. Vidovic has noted that given her dual role, some donors have been wary to put up funds—and the NGO particularly has suffered as a consequence.

bus service to bring people from outlying villages to town to visit relatives in the hospital. In Mostar, a group of mothers with mentally disabled children started a workshop for mentally disabled persons 17 and older who had completed school for children with special needs, filling a gap in the provision of services for mentally disabled young adults.

In addition, women are working individually and collectively within local community associations. The Center for Civic Initiatives in Banja Luka encouraged the development of a community group, including both men and women, to dispose of an unsanitary and unsightly garbage dump in their area. Men and women worked together to persuade a contracting company to remove the garbage, and they lobbied the municipality to provide fuel for the removal trucks.

At the macro level, women report that women’s issues are being discussed more openly and regularly. However, structural barriers to women’s equality remain. This may be explained by the lack of a cohesive women’s movement in Bosnia that is able and willing to speak out on mainstream political issues in addition to gender-specific issues. Even among vocal women’s groups, some observers have noted a lack of “gender awareness” or sensitivity in their being able to define gender issues. For example, the president of a women’s organization

in Banja Luka expressed discomfort with “feminist ideas” and the implicit emphasis placed on opposition between women and men. Although the organization took part in the preparation of the Women’s Human Rights report, she felt that women’s rights were secondary to broader human rights issues. There may be an absence of comprehensive gender training provided to women’s organizations, because it may be assumed that women’s organizations do not need such training. Such responses indicate that many clearly do.

In addition, a women’s NGOs are generally unwilling to cooperate with women politicians. On the one hand, the government has been unresponsive to advocacy initiatives by women’s NGOs, leading to a sense of futility. On the other hand, given a deep cynicism and distrust of the government, some groups feel that involvement at any level with politicians may compromise the goals of their organizations. Such organizations are not yet confident of having established sufficient independence to engage with the government. It will take time and perhaps the identification of issues of mutual concern before links can be improved. Still, there are some women who, recognizing the potential pitfalls, bridge the gap by serving in both the political and NGO worlds.

From a gender perspective, it appears that women’s organizations have succeeded in addressing some “practical gender interests” and have begun to move on to “stra-

tegic gender interests.” However, for the effective sustainable empowerment of women, practical and strategic gender issues need to be substantively linked. One woman suggested that through microcredit programs, women should be made more aware of the general economic situation and the laws that discriminate against them as women and small entrepreneurs.

A glance at the gender breakdown of the heads of international organizations and embassies shows that the international community is not setting a positive example. All but one of the primary political and diplomatic personnel are men. However, some international organizations have dedicated both time and resources to female representation and leadership with positive results. No-

tably, it is women within these organizations who have pushed the issue. The most widely recognized achievements of women’s NGOs in this area are the women’s voter education campaign (funded by USAID) and the support for a quota of women representatives in the 1998 elections. Although external assistance facilitated this process, *the impetus came from the women’s NGOs themselves*. The fact that USAID and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe did not interfere with the implementation of the project is noteworthy, because the women’s NGOs were able to maintain “ownership” over the project and its success.

# 3. Foreign Assistance Given To Women's Organizations

## Nature and Forms Of International Assistance

International assistance to Bosnian women's organizations has taken a variety of forms, including direct cash grants, microcredit, and training. In general, most cash grants have been accompanied by management, fund-raising, proposal writing, advocacy, and microcredit training.

Most of the cash grants provided to women's organizations are for specific projects. Few cover general operating costs. The largest funding institution devoted to women's projects is the Bosnian Women's Initiative, which provides grants for, among other things, a partial salary subsidy. These grants are largely geared toward covering equipment or production costs. Kvinna till Kvinna, however, supports a small number of women's organizations with the general aim of increasing women's voices in society and their awareness of women's rights. Similarly, the Delphi International/Star Project provided direct grants of between 5,000 and 60,000 deutsche marks to advocacy-related organizations while also supporting broader projects, such as workshops, conferences, and training sessions. Some groups have received funding from the EU Phare project and other European donors. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives provides one-time grants to projects for specific items. According to the Office of Transition Initiatives, women's organizations constitute 13 percent of recipient organizations and account for 9 percent of total funds distributed.

Microcredit programs targeting women beneficiaries are almost exclusively at the low end of the loan market, divvying out only between 1,000 and 5,000 deutsche marks per loan. Moreover, the largest credits do not emphasize gender as a significant component. A study conducted by the Delphi International/MEET Project found that women receive less than 26 percent of all microcredit grants (save Bospo) and the average loan size is 20 percent higher for male borrowers (Delphi International/MEET 1998).

Training at the organizational level concentrates on NGO

development, capacity building, fund-raising, and advocacy. Several different agencies provided these sessions, and women's organizations that had taken part in them noted the importance of the support. Given that the whole concept of NGOs was new to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the training was vital if organizations were to survive and grow in the postconflict era. Advocacy training was particularly well received; there is no word in the local language for "advocacy." Delphi International/Star provided resources that enabled women from Bosnia, Croatia, and Macedonia to put together a workbook on advocacy that has been widely distributed. Those who have used it consider it valuable in their everyday work. Training also has served as a way to develop leadership among the individuals within an organization.

## Areas of Tension and Cooperation Between Donors and NGOs

Many women noted the vital role that international agencies have played in building links between international women's organizations. First, the links have released women's organizations from the isolation created by the war. Being part of a global women's network is important, ideologically and financially, for the work of those groups.

The best cooperation with donors has taken place when donors were responsive to the needs and issues identified by the women's organizations. Both Kvinna till Kvinna and Delphi International/Star were cited as prime examples of this kind of partnership, under which the organizations were able to develop organically, which many feel is the key to a successful and sustainable organization. Delphi in particular played a major role as facilitator of a women's network, organizing conferences and workshops requested by the members of the network.

Political support, where it has been given, has also been essential. The women's voter education project was again mentioned as a good example because the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gave its full political backing to the project.

**Table 1. Summary of Points of Cooperation and Tension**

<b>Cooperation</b>	<b>Tension</b>
Response to needs identified by local women's organizations	Lack of coordination between donors/international organizations
Links with regional and international women's organizations	Donor directives
Facilitation of local networking activities	Lack of continuity
Leadership/advocacy/media staff training	Imposition of inappropriate models
Political support	Lack of political support/obstruction Lack of vocal support from senior USAID officials
Training in capacity building	Uninformed staff
Study tours abroad	Careless selection of local partners

Despite the enthusiasm with which women acknowledged support of the international community, most were able to enumerate difficulties they had had with donors. First, there is a lack of coordination among donors, which has resulted in wasted funds and ineffectual programming. Because some women's organizations have confronted international staff with this problem, a gender coordinating group was established under the auspices of the Office of the High Representative's (OHR's) Human Rights Task Force. It includes OHR, OSCE, UNICEF, Oxfam, the UN Development Program, the Council of Europe, the International Human Rights Law Group, Kvinna till Kvinna, the UN mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the International Organization for Migration, and the National Democratic Institute. It has only partly solved the problem.

A second related issue is the problem with donor agendas. Some of the stronger women's NGOs have been able to reject donors, including USAID, which have approached the NGOs with projects outside their intended scope of work. Smaller and less financially secure groups are more likely to succumb to such pressure. For example, a small women's legal aid center in the Republika Srpska recently took on a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees project to provide cattle to people returning to the area. In addition to a perceived arrogance on the part of donors, the pace at which the agendas change prevents continuity and proficiency in a particular area. This pressure both fuels competition for funds and restricts the ability of organizations to specialize in a particular area or develop a broader range of services that could be provided by NGOs in general.

Related to this is the attempt to develop "the third sector," or civil society. Although most NGOs, including women's NGOs, address "civil society" somewhere in their mission statements or sectoral areas, it is not clear that all groups share the same understanding of the term. Some women's organizations feel they are not capable of effecting change because they are not connected to a political party. This phenomenon may have resulted from international agencies using local NGOs as service providers during the war, without committing resources at the time to develop their potential as civil society institutions (Smillie 1996).

Some organizations also commented on the use of inappropriate development models. Some agencies have attempted to apply in Bosnia project designs developed elsewhere in the world without duly considering contextual and cultural differences.

To a certain extent, these comments also applied to staff of international agencies. A few organizations indicated that some donor staff have been poorly prepared to work in Bosnia. They further noted that the staff of women's organizations found this level of ignorance tiresome because they needed to provide history lessons before explaining the content of their project. This is said to have led, in some cases, to a careless selection of local implementing partners. In the same vein, some organizations commented that donors and international agencies tend to give attention to only a small number of larger organizations concentrated in the major cities, neglecting and marginalizing budding groups in more remote areas. In particular, there was notable frustration at the selection of "favorites" that receive the bulk of attention and fund-



ing regardless of their areas of expertise or absorptive capacity. At the same time, international staff have commented that some of the larger women's NGOs are unwilling to pass up projects or funding that could otherwise go to smaller groups.

The emphasis on donor visibility, noted both during the war in Bosnia and recently in Kosovo, disturbed some women's organizations that found the only evidence of the donor's presence in certain areas to be agency emblems posted on fences or buildings.

Although political support given in the context of the women's voter education project was vital to its success, women's organizations also have commented on the lack of support given at other times, which in some cases obstructed their work. Bosnian women's organizations also have been disappointed by the lack of vocal public support from senior USAID officials on the contributions that women's organizations have made in promoting democracy.

## **Sustainability Of Women's Organizations**

Donors have been raising the sustainability issue with local partners since 1997, but because money has always been available—in some cases, increasing amounts of it—sustainability has not been taken seriously. This year (1999), however, marks the end of the four-year funding program for Bosnia–Herzegovina. In addition, the Kosovo crisis has diverted both funds and personnel away from Bosnia. Still, the state of the economy and the legal infrastructure do not bode well for most organizations. Income-generating activities are under particular threat, given the requirement to register as a business and thus become subject to stiff tax liabilities—such as the 80 percent employer contribution on staff salaries to social security benefits. Most donors recognize the difficulty in achieving sustainability, despite an increased emphasis on it. Both DemNet and the Bosnian Women's Initiative feature sustainability as a criterion of the organizations they support.

Given the enormous growth of the NGO sector since the end of the war and the increasing diversion of aid, the process of “developmental Darwinism” is likely to begin soon. That is, the strongest NGOs will survive, while the weaker organizations will either fade away or join other groups. Because a number of women's organiza-

tions have established links with international women's groups and developed supporters outside the donor community in Bosnia, they may be more likely to withstand the inevitable withdrawal of funds.

Local fund-raising is still difficult but not impossible. The Center for Civic Initiatives in Banja Luka reported that some of the smaller community groups have succeeded in securing both in-kind contributions and cash donations from local businesses. Some of the larger women's organizations also are finding ways to support at least part of their activities. When Delphi International/Star required its grantees to come up with 15 percent of their budgets in other funds or in-kind contributions, the NGOs were able to meet this requirement—although with some difficulty. Medica Zenica, for example, rents out one of its schoolhouses while the students are away in summer. The funds they receive to use this facility as a conference center enable them to pay for the girls' schooling. Although ingenuity makes up for some project costs, the operating costs of the larger organizations will remain dependent on external funding of some sort.

## **Factors Affecting Performance And Impact**

### **LEVELS OF FUNDING**

One lesson that appears to emerge from international assistance to Bosnia is that large-scale, high-profile, and well-funded projects may be less successful than smaller initiatives. The Bosnian Women's Initiative is an example. When it was launched as a \$5 million fund for women, the ensuing chaos in establishing operational strategy and selection criteria resulted in fierce competition between women's organizations and weak, ill-conceived projects, because the motive seemed to be to engage as many women as possible under the grant. Since then, the approach has been to scale back and decentralize. The maximum number of beneficiaries per project is now about 25, which appears to better promote long-term sustainability.

Meanwhile, smaller scale funding umbrellas, such as Delphi International/Star and Kvinna till Kvinna, appear to have achieved more with less. Funding has been concentrated on a few key groups, but general funds also have been available to support the wider network. It appears that the flexibility of the funding has been

more significant than the amount. Moreover, the lack of funding available to women's groups in the Republika Srpska meant that they learned they could do something from nothing. This, however, is not to say that women's organizations do not need funding. Operating costs and staff salaries quickly drain resources. Because local organizations are rarely allowed overheads, funds must be siphoned off general project funds, restricting the amount available for implementation. Here donor coordination could be essential in limiting duplication and concentrating resources on specific targets.

#### TIMING, START, AND DURATION OF FUNDING

The longest funding cycle is one year, reflecting the donor community's holding pattern in an emergency phase without a longer term plan. For most women's organizations, this short-term approach has not been problematic because funding was virtually ensured from one of a number of sources. Some organizations have begun to think in terms of five-year plans, while others confess to being wholly unprepared.

The time delay between acceptance of proposals and disbursement of funds was noted as a particular problem for projects funded by the European Union, where the lag can be up to a year. This affects both international and local organizations, although international organizations are more likely to have access to funds from headquarters to tide them over during the lag. In addition, in some cases, the proposal application is particularly complex, and the funding stipulations inflexible.

Attempts to identify impacts and emphases on output within strict time limits also have hindered the performance of women's NGOs. One example of the consequences of time constraints and outputs is Knitting Together Nations, a World Bank initiative. Knitting Together Nations is modeled after a project in Bangladesh that created a low-income women's sewing enterprise that now competes in international markets. Donor enthusiasm for Knitting Together Nations created unrealistic expectations, culminating in a disastrous Paris fashion show nine months after the project started. Most donors pulled out of the project.

## 4. Selected Observations

There is no doubt that international assistance has been critical in improving and even saving the lives of many women during and after the war in Bosnia. It has also contributed to an increased awareness of gender issues through the funding of studies and advocacy campaigns, particularly those seeking increased political participation for women.

Assistance that targets women is largely channeled through women's organizations. This stems from the war effort in which women constituted the majority of beneficiaries and ran many of the assistance delivery organizations. It also reflects the tendency of women-run organizations to reach out to women. In that sense, it has enabled the inclusion of a greater number of female beneficiaries. Women-run organizations, however, have in some cases been pigeonholed in providing humanitarian or other "soft aid." In the postconflict era, the impact of humanitarian assistance is overshadowed by more lucrative infra-

structure and other construction-related projects operated primarily by men. Simultaneously, making women's organizations wholly responsible for women's needs relinquishes male-run and international organizations from the responsibility of including women or considering gender issues. Such a division makes the introduction of gender awareness more difficult.

In addition, channeling aid to women through women's organizations does not necessarily result in the empowerment of women at the grass-roots level. Few women's organizations in Bosnia were able to make the link between aid and empowerment. Those that did emphasized concepts of "ownership" and self-help. Aid alone is not sufficient to induce empowerment. A holistic approach is needed to address institutional and societal as well as economic constraints to the advancement of women.

# References

- Bringa, Tone. 1995. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cockburn, C. 1998. *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London: Zed Books.
- Delphi International/MEET. 1998. *Special Report on Women's Participation Levels in Microcredit Programs in BiH*. Sarajevo.
- Donia, R. J.; and Fine, J.V.A. 1994. *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Medica Zenica. 1996. "Surviving the Violence: War and Violence against Women Are Inseparable." Information bulletin.
- Medica Zenica Infoteka. 1999. *A Second Look: To Live Without Violence*. Zenica, Bosnia–Herzegovina: Medica Zenica.
- Piza Lopez, E.; and March, C. 1990. "Gender Considerations in Economic Enterprises." Report of a workshop held in the Philippines, November 1990. Oxfam Discussion Paper No. 2. Oxford, England: Oxfam.
- Smillie, Ian. 1996. "Service Delivery or Civil Society? Nongovernmental Organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina." A report for CARE Zagreb.
- Walsh, Martha. 1997. *Postconflict Bosnia and Herzegovina: Integrating Women's Special Situation and Gender Perspectives in Skills Training and Employment Promotion Programs*, Geneva: ILO.
- . 1998. "Mind the Gap: Where Feminist Theory Failed to Meet Development Practice—A Missed Opportunity in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 5, 1998: 329–343.
- Zena Zenama. 1998. Annual report. Unpublished.